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Testimony of Shirley Bergert¹
Before the Energy and Technology Committee
Regarding S.B. No. 447 Section 8 (electric, gas and water terminations)
An Act Modernizing the State's Telecommunications Laws
March 20, 2012

Recommended action: Reject section 8
The proposal creates unnecessary dangers for vulnerable individuals.

Section 8 of this bill would allow an electric, gas, water or telephone utility to terminate service to a residential dwelling exclusively by use of email, *eliminating use of a mailed notice*. This creates a risk of danger among low income utility customers where access to email may depend on use of library computer facilities or older computer equipment which may not be reliable. If internet service has been terminated, or the household does not receive the notice or receive it in a timely manner for any reason, the household members may not have a reasonable opportunity to avoid a shut off. There are dangers involved in living without utility service, including the risk of fire, inability to prepare food or maintain a sanitary environment, and a low income household is likely to lose all refrigerated food.

An email notice, *if it supplemented a mailed notice*, could prove beneficial in avoiding utility shut-offs. A utility may currently supplement mailed notice with email notice with no change in state law.

The bill language requires a customer authorization to use emailed notice in lieu of mailed notice. However, it is unclear how this authorization will be handled or how the authorization may be withdrawn. **Considering the risks inherent in a utility shut-off, utilities seeking to utilize an email shut-off notice should first demonstrate the efficacy of such procedure. Only after it has been demonstrated to consistently provide timely and effective notice should the legislature consider modifying the law to eliminate mailed notice.**

The legislature should firmly reject this bill and S.B. No. 332 (An Act Concerning Utility Service Termination and The Appointment of a Receiver) which would authorize dangerous Friday terminations of utility services, by. The well-being of our vulnerable neighbors is at stake.

¹ CT Legal Services represents low income state residents in civil legal matters. Shirley Bergert serves on the Low Income Energy Advisory Board, Energy Conservation Management Board, Fuel Oil Conservation Board, and the Advisory Board for the Institute for Sustainable Energy.